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Brigantine beach fix waits for winter

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BRIGANTINE-A planned \$4.5 million beach replenishment project in the city's north end has been delayed again, but city officials are looking on the bright side. The delays have allowed the project to miss a busy storm season that has been carving up New Jersey beaches for the past few weeks.

The project originally was scheduled for August, but was pushed back until this month. After meeting with representatives of the Army Corps of Engineers on Wednesday, city officials say the project now will likely start in December or January.

"The way we are looking at this, we may have gotten a break," City Manager Jim Barber said. "We've missed all the storms that have been coming up the coast. Of course there are still northeasters in December and January, but there are usually fewer than what we've been seeing lately. If this project had been done on schedule, we would have already lost half the sand."

As it is, the city has seen serious erosion in the north end over the past two weeks near the city's seawall. The south end of the island, which is not part of the replenishment project, also has been hit hard by erosion, Barber said.

The plan calls for replenishment of 1.8 miles of beach starting at the seawall and running to about 14th Street. The cost of the project will be split among federal, state and city funding.

However, getting the project started has not been easy. It originally was scheduled to begin in August to avoid conflict with the nesting of endangered piping plovers in the north end. It was then delayed after the dredge to be used in the project was needed in Florida to complete replenishment projects there. Those projects were delayed by the series of hurricanes that have hit the Gulf Coast this year.

Those storms also are causing this delay. While the dredge is now freed up, the miles of dredge piping needed for the project are still being used in the South, Barber said.

The Army Corps had been under pressure to complete the project in this fiscal year since federal replenishment funding may be cut, but since the delays have been caused by storms federally designated as disasters, the funding will stay in place.

The project will take about 14 to 18 days, but the Army Corps will schedule work for about a month in case of bad weather, Barber said.

The city also is beginning preparations for a dredging of St. Georges Thoroughfare to help boat congestion in the area. The thoroughfare's channel, at the southern tip of the island, has become so clogged it can accommodate only one boat at a time, Barber said.

"This is just in the preliminary stages and we haven't talked about financing or anything like that," barber said. "But there are a lot of boaters living in that area and the Army Corps has acknowledged that it needs to be done. We hope we can get a project in place by next year."

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